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ABSTRACT

The utility of the controversial elementary social studies program, "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), is argued in this paper. A list of 12 charges made by Congressman John Conlan against MACOS, with responses to the charges, is presented. Specific passages in the student materials, films, and teacher materials are examined in context and the likely effect this information will have on the value structure of American elementary school students is discussed. Issues raised include evolution, arctic survival, population pressures, limited resources, species survival, starvation, and cultural myths. The author concludes that MACOS stimulates the intellectual, emotional, and social growth of children. It encourages them to think clearly and to develop new skills for approaching the study of human behavior in a systematic way. Specific references from the MACOS program are included in the document. (Author/DB)

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MACOS CONTROVERSY:

RESPONSES TO CHARGES BY JOHN CONLAN

By

Peter B. Dow
Education Development Center, Inc.

SO 009 513

1975

Dow, Peter B. Enclosure accompanying form letters sent by Dow to inquirers about the MACOS controversy, June 30, 1975 (and thereafter).

In the left-hand column below are a list of charges against Man: A Course of Study that constitute the basic argument taken by John Conlan in his debates in the House Committee on Science and Technology, and the materials in which references to these topics appear. In the right-hand column are responses to the charges, written by Peter Dow of Education Development Center.

CHARGE:

1. Cruel murder of old people. Student Material: A Journey to the Arctic, Page 21. Teacher Material: The Netsilik Eskimos on the Ice, Page 18 B; Talks to Teachers, Page 101.

RESPONSE:

A Journey to the Arctic contains excerpts from the diary of Knud Rasmussen, the famous Danish explorer who spent a year living with and studying the Netsilik Eskimos in 1923. Rasmussen writes, "I asked many people how old people were treated, and from all the questions I heard only one case that sounded like heartlessness." The entry goes on to recount the story of an unlucky hunter named Arfek who neglected his wife's mother, leaving her behind on the winter trek and showing more concern for the survival of his wife and children than for the old woman. Arfek's dilemma, namely the choice between the care of his wife and children and the care of his aging mother-in-law, is presented to children as a problem not only central to Netsilik society ("No one wishes to harm old people. We too may be old some day.") but also the central problem for any society, including our own. Children are fascinated by this issue, they identify with old people, and they are conscious that the problems that Arfek faces are problems for their own families as well. It is the moral dilemma posed by Arfek's plight that Man: A Course of Study seeks to raise.

CHARGE:

2. Female Infanticide. Student Material: A Journey to the Arctic, Pages 24 and 25.

RESPONSE:

Here again we have a passage from Rasmussen's journal. Says Rasmussen, "A startling thing about the Netsilik Eskimos' struggle to survive is how they feel about children. They would like to have many sons and few daughters. If a girl baby has not already been promised as a future wife, a family may feel that they cannot provide for her. If there is no family to adopt her, it is their custom to allow the child to die. Netsilik mothers dare not feel any affection for their new-born children until they know that the child will live." Here again we find a cultural dilemma. In the harsh Arctic environment, where survival is dependent upon a successful hunt, males are preferred. Under these extreme conditions, only males in the prime of life have the stamina to sustain the difficulties of the hunt during the winter months. In addition, the nursing of a girl child may delay for several years the birth of a boy. So, under these conditions, mothers sometimes sacrifice daughters in order that the group may prosper. It is a cruel choice but a deeply human one, illustrating the price these people are prepared to pay so as to sustain their culture. Why subject young children to these harsh realities? Only, I guess, because the issue is as relevant to our own future as it is to the traditional culture of the Netsilik Eskimos. It is common knowledge, even within elementary schools, that unrestrained population growth is one of the

most serious threats to the survival of human culture as we know it. To create a civilized life for mankind in the future, we shall have to care as deeply as the Eskimos do about population control and the provision of a decent chance for those who are allowed to come into the world. Elementary school is not too early for the next generation of American adults to begin thinking about this question. For the Netsilik, the newborn child does not become "human" until he or she receives a name. For them, allowing a child to die prior to naming is not unlike our own practice of aborting a fetus during pregnancy. We, as well as the Netsilik, have ways of eliminating unwanted children. To become human, one might say, the "right to life" is not enough. One also needs the gift of parental care and a reasonable chance to develop into a productive, sane adult. Lacking that, both we and the Netsilik would appear to agree that death, however harsh, is the more humane alternative.

CHARGE:

3. Killing and gory butchering of animals in full and vivid color. Film: "Winter Sea Ice Camp, Part I." Teacher Material: The Netsilik Eskimos on the Sea Ice, Page 40.

RESPONSE:

The film entitled "Winter Sea Ice Camp, Part I" records a successful seal kill. Obviously, a society based on hunting must kill to survive. We too kill to eat, although we manage to sequester our blood-letting in slaughter houses. Many people increasingly feel that the indifference of children to violence and issues of killing results in part from the fact that they have only observed killing as make-believe, unlike earlier times when most American children were exposed to killing of this kind on the farm. I have never met anyone who had witnessed such acts that did not regard the experience as an important, formative event in his or her life. Some would argue that the Netsilik films are not enough; that children today should be exposed directly to the fact that animals are slaughtered daily so that they may live.

CHARGE:

4. Sex education is being subtly taught. Student Material: Life Cycle, Page 7; Herring Gulls, Page 18-19; Baboons, Page 14-22; Salmon, Page 4-7; Animal Adaptation, Page 9-11. Teacher Material: "Books for Children on Reproduction," A Guide to the Course, Page 34. Annotation for A Baby is Born reads: "Contains important information about human reproduction and good diagrams of the male and female bodies."

RESPONSE:

In a literal sense, this is true. In all of the animal materials, there are brief references to the facts of reproduction. As these materials stress such things as the life cycle variables that are common to all animals--namely birth, length of dependency, reproduction, care of the young, and death--it would be difficult to avoid the issue of reproduction in some form. We have avoided almost entirely any discussion of human reproduction, as Man: A Course of Study is more concerned with the psychology, sociology, and anthropology of human behavior than it is with the facts of human biology. A Baby is Born, a book that appears in the bibliography, was actually designed for children younger than fifth graders. It is obviously up to the teacher to decide whether or not he or she wishes to refer children to books listed in the bibliography which, of course, are not included in the course.

Introductory Lessons, Salmon includes this: "It is helpful to have live animals in the classroom when discussing reproduction. The grasshopper is a particularly good animal to observe. The male and female are easily identifiable, and the children can see the male mount the female, the female lay eggs, and the eggs develop." Page 57 shows a woodcut of two sea gulls. The caption reads, "In this picture, a male gull is mounting a female. The sperm will pass through his body through a passage under his tail. It will enter the female's body through a passage located under her tail. The sperm will unite with the eggs inside the female's body."

Frankly, I cannot imagine a more tasteful and less threatening way to introduce children to the facts of life than to expose them, as these materials do, to animal studies. I have never been particularly partial myself to the more explicit approaches to sex education that are now fashionable. Sometimes these programs, it seems to me, bend over backwards to expose children to sex information that they are not especially interested in. Man: A Course of Study avoids that problem by placing the discussion of reproduction in the context of the larger perspective of social organization, adaptation, care of the young, and species survival.

CHARGE:

5. Murder and cannibalism. Teacher Material: Talks to Teachers.

RESPONSE:

In material that is provided for teachers only, Rasmussen quotes an Eskimo who describes some events that happened during an extremely severe winter when many Eskimos died of starvation and cold due to poor hunting. The first passage describes Tunek who lost his mind and who tried to save his life by eating his wife. The second passage refers to Tunek's brother Itquilik, who killed a younger brother and ate him in order to save his own life. These are, admittedly, unpleasant stories that point up what can happen when human beings are driven to the point of starvation. They are background information for the teacher and would be shared with children only at the teacher's discretion.

CHARGE:

6. Divorce and trial marriage, polygamy and polyandry, and wife swapping. Teacher Material: Talks to Teachers.

RESPONSE:

As mentioned earlier, environmental pressures lead to a shortage of adult women. This explains in part the background for polyandry and wife exchange. Actually, it is more the economic necessity than the impulse toward sexual promiscuity that brings about this situation. A man is incapable of surviving in the Arctic for any length of time without a wife, and should his wife die or be indisposed from sickness or pregnancy, it is necessary for him under certain circumstances to

acquire another woman. Wife-exchange often takes place between song partners or hunting partners in the same spirit of reciprocity that governs the sharing of food. Man: A Course of Study in no way condones these practices, but provides this information as background for teachers. I suppose one could argue that teachers teaching about Eskimos should be denied access to the facts of Eskimo life, but I am at a loss to know what the basis of that argument would be. The only other conclusion that one might come to is that one shouldn't teach about Eskimos at all, but that would mean removing from the curriculum a subject that has fascinated young children for generations. Clearly, some of these passages are probably not appropriate for young children, but as anyone can see from examining our materials, we have been extremely careful to discriminate between the information that we provide for teachers as background information and the materials that are prepared for children.

CHARGE:

7. Religion is treated as a myth. Seminars for Teachers, page 110: "Compare the Netsilik world view with that of the ancient Greeks, Winnebago Indians, Norsemen, and Judeo-Christians in "Genesis." Are there similar events or characters in the myths?"

RESPONSE:

In Seminars for Teachers, a program that is entirely separate from the student program, teachers examine the mythological explanations for human origins that are found in different cultures. The use of the term "myth" is in the anthropological sense, meaning a story that explains the unknown or the supernatural. In a discussion of myth, we tend to use the terms "myth" and "belief" interchangeably and to distinguish these forms of explanation from "scientific" explanations. There is no attempt in Man: A Course of Study to suggest that scientific explanations are "better" than religious or mythological ones. On the contrary, one of the objectives of these materials is to show that mythological and religious explanations are as strong as scientific ones. In Jerome Bruner's first description of Man: A Course of Study he quoted the following passage from French anthropologist Levi-Strauss:

> Prevalent attempts to explain alleged differences between the so-called primitive mind and scientific thought have resulted in qualitative differences between the working processes of the mind in both cases, while assuming that the entities which they were studying remained very much the same. If our interpretation is correct, we are led toward a completely different view--namely, that the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of things to which it is applied. This is well in agreement with the situation known to prevail in the field of technology: what makes a steel ax superior to a stone ax is not that the first one is better than the second. They are equally well-made, but steel is quite different from stone. In the same way we may be able to show that the same logical processes operate in myth

as in science, and that man has always been thinking equally well; the improvement lies, not in the alleged progress of man's mind, but in the discovery of new areas to which it may apply its unchanged and unchanging power.

CHARGE:

8. Evolution is being taught as fact. Student Materials: references to man as an "animal." Teacher Material: Talks to Teachers, Page 45.

RESPONSE:

Man: A Course of Study does indeed include an evolutionary perspective on human behavior; it is not the only perspective, and the concepts of evolutionary theory are only sketchily developed, because children of this age would have a great deal of difficulty grasping many of the ideas that are central to an understanding of the theory. There are occasional references, however, in the Man and Animal section of the course, that suggest that human beings are undergoing a process of evolution just the way other animals are. The fossil record clearly documents that the structure of the human body has changed during the last several million years. None of this information, however, is designed to undermine Judeo-Christian beliefs. Darwin's work may suggest a revised time-frame for considering the origins of man and the other creatures that inhabit the earth, but in no way does the theory of evolution displace the existence of God. Those who argue to the contrary remind me of the critics of Galileo who for some reason thought that the discovery of a helio-centric solar system would destroy the Christian church. Christianity easily weathered that blow, and I am fully confident that it will survive the challenge of evolution. The survival of the species undoubtedly depends upon the vitality and growth of both knowledge and belief.

CHARGE:

9. Murder and revenge. A Journey to the Arctic, Page 15: [Eskimo's account] "...hatred grew in me, and every time I met my old companion out hunting, thoughts which I could not control came up in me. So one day when we were alone together, I killed him." [Rasmussen's comment]: "The dead man's relatives might take revenge on him. Igsivalitak knew that and was not afraid. But he was afraid of the men who would come from the settlements in the

RESPONSE:

This is an interesting passage taken from Rasmussen's journal describing an outlaw who indeed did kill his hunting partner. The price he paid for doing so was ostracism from his community and the continuing fear that the relatives of the dead man would seek retribution--their only recourse in a society that has no legal system. What is especially interesting about the passage is Rasmussen's belief that the man should be answerable to the dictates of his own society, not ours (therefore the immunity from prosecution by the Canadian police); and his preaching of the Christian ethic, "Thou shalt not kill," and receiving the response from an incredulous Eskimo who had heard about the Western practice of warfare, a custom unknown among the Eskimos. It seems self-evident that there is much in the contrast between Western and Eskimo values to discuss in this passage.

south, the Canadian police, who would punish him in their own way and in a place that would be strange to him. It was a sad story and I talked to the outlaw a long time about it. I told him not to run away from the Canadian police or to resist them if they surprised him. It seemed to me that he could not rightly be punished according to customs and laws he knew nothing about. Still, I explained to him as well as I could the Sixth Commandment: 'Thou Shalt Not Kill,' but he did not really believe me because once in Repulse Bay a trader told him about the World War."

CHARGE:

10. Bestiality. Student Material: Kiviok, The Man With Many Lives. Examples: "Kiviok is one of us, a Netsilik, but a man with many lives....He was here when animals turned themselves into humans and people could become animals....He was here, perhaps, from the beginning."

The Seal Boy Leads Kiviok Out to Sea: "The Netsilik Eskimos had killed a man from another tribe so the man's widow taught her son to revenge his father's death by dressing him in the skins of unborn seals, teaching him to hold his breath and swim under water in order to lead men out to sea to be drowned."

RESPONSE:

This book contains a series of stories about the legendary hero Kiviok, a Paul Bunyan-like character who roams the Arctic performing feats of daring and strength, overcoming the forces of destruction by the strength of his courage, independence, and aggressive spirit. These stories are presented to children to help them see what an Eskimo culture hero is like. As the Teacher's Guide says, "The individual adventures are not as important as the fact of Kiviok's restless search for danger and his urge to overcome it." While this book is clearly presented to children as a collection of legends, and the Teacher's Guide states "All men know that they will never achieve the powers of the mighty Kiviok," and the first chapter entitled "Kiviok, the Man with Many Lives" makes clear that Kiviok has been around since the earliest times and could not possibly be an ordinary mortal, still I would agree that the book would be strengthened by an introduction for children that places these "traditional tales" in a mythological context. We will do so in the revision that is currently under way. Jerome Bruner personally adapted these materials for children from stories collected by Knud Rasmussen. The basic argument for using material of this kind is that through it we can begin to perceive the "worldview" of the Netsilik Eskimo. What are the issues that are revealed in these graphic tales? What are the fears and hopes that dominate Netsilik life? Perhaps the most powerful message that comes through here is the way in which Eskimo life is inextricably bound up with the lives of animals. The problem of

Kiviok Visits the Two Spider-Women: "...The women were small--they were spiders in human form...." Their husbands had gone hunting so Kiviok became the husband to both of them.

Kiviok Teaches the Wolves to Hunt Caribou: "Kiviok was lonely in his old village. His old parents were dead, and one of his wives had taken another husband. So before long he set out again. Soon he came to a house where a mother and her daughter lived. They were big and strong, for they were wolves in human form. Kiviok stayed with them and taught them... to hunt the caribou. The daughter could run fast and she brought down many caribou. So Kiviok took her to wife and lived with her.... As time went on, the old woman grew angry, for she wanted a husband. She envied her daughter more and more until one day when Kiviok was out hunting caribou, she killed her. She pulled the young smooth skin from the daughter's face and hands, and with it she covered her wrinkled, old face and her bony hands."

Kiviok Takes a Fox Wife: "Once more Kiviok was alone and had no woman to help him....One day Kiviok found a new wife. They were happy through the summer. But when winter approached, two wolverines in human form came to live nearby. The little fox was frightened...and ran away." Kiviok

survival in the Arctic turns around the need to kill animals to survive, and the recognition that without a continuing supply of animals, Netsilik culture would collapse. Thus the dependency on animals, the impulse to identify with them, and the fear that they may disappear represent consistent themes throughout the Kiviok material. The Netsilik believe that animals, like humans, have souls and that human beings and animals will be re-united in the after-life.

Another theme in the Kiviok stories is the relationship between husband and wife, and the tension between the settled life and the life of the roving adventurer. Kiviok's life is full of manly conquests, but he always returns to his wife and children. The stories make it clear that husband and wife cannot survive for long without each other and will go to great lengths to preserve the bonds of marriage and family. Like all heroic stories and myths, the Kiviok tales are not to be thought of as describing anything that could exist, but rather as portraying extreme "larger than life" situations in order to engage the listener in the super-human drama that Kiviok's life exemplifies; in this sense they are reminiscent of Greek mythology, Grimm's fairy tales, and Kipling's Just-So Stories. All cultures have similar tales that attempt to explain man's relationship to the natural world. Also, there are many important references to origins of things, such as the salmon coming from the wood chips.

followed her, "because he had come to love his little fox wife....A lemming in human form ran out to him and said, 'I have been told to say that you should take me for a wife instead.'" An ermine, a marmot, a hare, a wolverine, and a wolf in human form, all wanted Kiviok to take them to wife. He liked the way the wolf looked but thought of his fox wife again and still wanted her back. He backed into an igloo with many entrances and found it had many rooms. "In it lived animals in human form. By the entrance, the marmots had their place. Their looks pleased Kiviok so much that he was about to stay with them, but then he saw his wife again, and he was so happy that he celebrated with all the animals."

Kiviok Surprises the Wild Goose and Finds a New Wife: "Once, when Kiviok was traveling on, he came to a lake where young women were playing. They were naked, running happily around in the water." Kiviok picked out the most prettily feathered dress and made his presence known. The women ran to their clothes, put them on, then flew away in the form of wild geese, except one who cried and begged for her clothes. Kiviok wouldn't give them to her because he wanted her for his wife. They lived together and had two sons. The goose-woman grew restless and taught her sons never to eat meat. One day the

woman began to pick up feathers. When she had enough she put them between the fingers of her sons and over their arms and shoulders. Then she put feathers on herself and they all flew away.

Kiviok Meets the Father of the Salmon: "Kiviok walked over the land in search of his goose-wife and their sons." He found Ekalok, the Father of the Salmon. "He was making salmon of driftwood. The splinters that flew from his axe turned into salmon and jumped right into a little river running along side him." Ekalok showed Kiviok where a goose with two goslings had gone. "But there was a big lake between which Kiviok could not cross." However, Kiviok made it across by riding a giant salmon. "That was how Kiviok came to the land of the wild geese and found the village where they lived in human form." Kiviok's sons saw him and ran to their mother who had married one of her own tribe. "The new husband of the goose-woman had made a tool kit out of his stomach when he took human form....The husband was so frightened that he scrambled out of the tent, forgeting his tool-bag stomach. But the wife stayed behind and burst into tears. And so Kiviok got his wife back again."

Kiviok is Buried in a Meat Cache to Catch a Thief: Meat was being stolen from a cache, so Kiviok hid himself in it to find out who was stealing the meat. While

everyone slept, a big man, a bear in human form, seized Kiviok and dragged him, but Kiviok pretended to be dead. He almost cried out in pain when the bear made a hole through his lips to fasten the drag-line. Then the bear pulled him through the snow as though Kiviok were a seal. After experiences in the bear's home, Kiviok escapes, and in the process causes the long mountain ridge to rise and a river to flow. It ends with the bear bursting open and causing the first fog.

Kiviok Goes to the Land of Strangers:
"It is also said that Kiviok has had many lives and that now, finally, he is living his last one. In earlier times, when he came to the end of a life he fell into a deathlike sleep, and when he awoke he began a new life.... He grew from one life to the next, and his years showed on his face. People say that he is fearsome to look at now. The last time our people saw him, they were almost scared to death by his face. So now he goes about with his face covered up, for it is quite black, moss-grown and hard as granite....All we know is that he is alive...."

12

CHARGE:

11. Many psychological devices are used throughout the course, including role-playing.

RESPONSE:

As any good teacher knows, one of the most powerful ways in which children work through their thoughts about the social world is through dramatic play. From the earliest years, children "pretend" that they are adults and discover who they are and who they aren't through spontaneous dramatic play. It is pretty much a commonplace assumption of educational theorists these days that education that is confined to sitting behind desks, listening to authoritative statements emanating from the front of the room, and deriving information solely from textbooks is a very limited way to stimulate the intellectual, emotional, and social growth of children. Exercising one's imagination about experiences which may be difficult, threatening, or too dangerous to achieve

directly, is one of the most powerful ways that children learn about the social world. Throughout the course, children are encouraged to "role play" various types of behavior, from the "authoritarian" relationship between parent and offspring exemplified in the Herring Gull materials, to the complexities of the baboon troop structure, to spontaneous reinactments of various social situations drawn from the Eskimo materials. One of the most popular pieces of material in the course is a little classroom drama written by Carter Wilson entitled The True Play: How Itimangnark Got Kingnuk, The Girl He Really Wanted, a play built around the courtship and marriage of the husband and wife whose lives are centrally featured in the Netsilik film series.

CHARGE:

12. Students are required to collect and use data, including secret observation. Children are pressured to bare every emotion and all private thoughts and actions of them and their parents.

RESPONSE:

This charge refers to our use of the Observer's Handbook which is a data-gathering device that helps students collect information about play, conflict, and learning. Using simplified techniques, children go into playgrounds, pre-schools, and their homes and neighborhoods to observe behavior much the way an anthropologist would. The purpose of this exercise is to train students in some of the simpler techniques of data gathering and data analysis. None of the information is secret, and the primary goal is to help students learn to think objectively about social situations. The model for this activity is Irven DeVore's Field Notes, which reveal in detail how DeVore went about constructing for himself a picture of baboon social organization. Children are not "pressured to bare every emotion." On the contrary, they are urged to think clearly and to develop new skills for approaching the study of human behavior in a systematic way.